



Lesson 4: Mother Crowned in Glory

I. INTRODUCTION

Last week we discussed the nature of dogmas and mentioned the four Marian dogmas. One of these we discussed in detail, namely, the Perpetual Virginité of Mary.

Tonight we are going to look at another title of the Virgin Mary, that of Mary as Queen Mother. This is a doctrine of the Church but has not been defined as a dogma.

We will begin by taking a look again at the famous passage in Revelation, chapter 12 about the “woman clothed with the sun.”

II. A HEAVENLY QUEEN

“A great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars...She brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.”

If you recall, those words come from Revelation 12:1 and 12:5 and they describe a vision seen by the Apostle John.

Previously we saw how this vision is tied to the image of Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant.

It also seems to depict Christ as a newborn king, destined to rule on a throne. Why, however, is the woman who gave birth to him depicted as a queen, crowned with stars and arrayed in glory?



The answer is found in a long tradition that runs right through the Old Testament and into the New.

III. MARY AS QUEEN

Over the past several weeks, we've seen how the authors of the New Testament rely on images and persons from the Old Testament to show us who and what Mary, the mother of Jesus, is and who and what Jesus Christ is.

- Thus far, we've looked at how Mary's motherhood was foreshadowed by the miraculous motherhood of women such as Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah.
- We've also seen how Mary is the New Eve, the mother of all who live in Christ.
- And we've studied how Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant, who bore, within her own body, the Word of God.

John's vision of a "woman clothed with the sun," also illuminates another important image of Mary.

- It is an image of Mary as Queen. And, like the other images we've talked about thus far, the New Testament writers use it to tell us the truth about Mary and about Christ.

In this session, we're going to unpack the meaning of that image. We're also going to look at that image's relationship to Mary's title, "Mother of God."



But, to understand what the Book of Revelation reveals, we need to once more go back into the Old Testament. In fact, a good place to start is Proverbs, chapter 31, and study the words of King Lemuel found at the end of the book.

IV. WISE ADVICE

- Read Proverbs 31:9

Now, a king almost always has advisors trying to tell him what he should do. That's part of being king.

Oftentimes, however, the advice he receives isn't aimed at benefiting him or the kingdom. It's aimed at benefiting the advisor. At other times, what sounds like advice, is really just flattery.

- But in the passage we just read, the person advising the king tells him to take care of the poor and the meek—the people who have no one else to defend them or care for them.

Who could speak freely enough to the king to give him that kind of advice?

The first verse of King Lemuel's chapter in Proverbs gives us the answer:

- “The words of Lemuel, king of Massa, which his mother taught him.” (Prov 31:1)



That makes perfect sense. Only the king's mother could speak to him that way. As a king, he might be her ruler, but he was still her son.

This chapter also records some of the other bits of wisdom Lemuel's mother passed along to her son. That wisdom includes tips such as don't fall in love with loose women, don't drink too much, and find a good wife.

That's advice any good mother would give her son. But, because this son happens to be king, his mother also has to remind him of his duties as a ruler.

He must be the voice of the defenseless, a power for the powerless. His kingdom must be for the poor and the meek.

A flattering courtier could never say anything like that to a king.

- Which is why it's not surprising that in ancient Near Eastern kingdoms like Israel, the queen mother (the mother of the king) was traditionally looked upon as the friend of the poor.

She was the intercessor between the king and the people.

And when we consider that the Book of Proverbs ends with a queen mother's advice, we can see just how important the inspired writers considered the wisdom of the queen mother.

Any ruler (or any person for that matter) who heard the book of Proverbs read, would be left with the queen mother's words ringing in his ears.



KING LEMUEL AND HIS MOTHER

So, who was this King Lemuel? And who was his wise mother?

We're not exactly sure.

King Lemuel is never mentioned any other place in Scripture: Only here, in Proverbs 31.

- One ancient Jewish tradition, however, says that Lemuel was actually a pseudonym for Solomon...
- ...who was the son of David and Bathsheba and the heir to David's kingdom.

As the heir, Solomon was the prototypical son of David, inheriting all the promises of a glorious kingdom that God made to David's line in 2 Samuel 7.

- He also is famous for having asked for and received great wisdom from God. In fact, he was so wise that people came from all over the world to seek his advice and hear him speak.
- But even with his great wisdom, he still listened to his mother's advice.

V. SOLOMON BOWS TO HIS MOTHER

In fact, one of the first things we hear about Solomon's reign is the important part his mother played in it.



Read 1 Kings 2:19

Let's review what just happened there.

- When Bathsheba enters her son's court, he bows to her.
- Then, he has her seated on a throne at his right hand.

Importantly, no subject other than the king's mother ever earned that honor—not during the reign of Solomon and not during the reign of any other Old Testament king. So, what happens after Bathsheba takes her seat?

Read 1 Kings 2:20-21

- Here, Bathsheba acts in her traditional role as intercessor for the people. She puts a request made by one of Solomon's brothers before her son.

Although Solomon told his mother he would grant her anything she asked, he actually doesn't this time around...which was a wise decision.

His brother was asking to marry one of David's concubines, and in ancient Near Eastern cultures, marrying the king's concubine or wife was tantamount to declaring yourself king.

What's important here, however, is not whether Solomon did as his mother asked.

- What's important is that he acknowledged her right to ask.

By placing the queen mother in such an exalted position, Solomon shows his court (and us) that the queen mother has the right to intercede for others.



Ultimately, however, it is the king who is the final judge.

VI. THE QUEEN MOTHER IN THE DAVIDIC KINGDOM

- After Solomon's death, the queen mother continued to be one of the distinctive features of the Davidic kingdom.

And while we don't hear about her very often, every time we do, it's clear that she has great influence.

- In Jeremiah 13:18, God's instructions to Jeremiah begin with these words: "Say to the king and the queen mother..."

The prophecy of doom that then follows would not have been addressed to both the king and his mother unless they were both powerful leaders in the kingdom.

Eventually, Jeremiah's prophecy came true. The Babylonians destroyed the kingdom, and their emperor Nebuchadnezzar took away all the important people of Jerusalem.

- "And he carried away Jehoiachin [the king] to Babylon; the king's mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the chief men of the land, he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon." (2 Kgs 24:15)

Note that the king comes first, then his mother, and then his wives. That tells us that the queen mother is next in importance to the king and more important than his wives.



All through the history of the Davidic kingdom, the queen mother occupied that place, second only to the king. There was even a special word for the queen mother in Hebrew.

- She was called Gebirah [Guh-beer-uh], meaning “Great Lady.”

VII. THE PLACE OF THE GEBIRAH

Let’s review the duties of the queen mother that we’ve talked about so far:

- First, as we saw in Proverbs 31, she advised the king as no one else could.

Of all his subjects, she was the only one to whom he owed any kind of obedience.

- Second, she interceded for the people before the king.

Interestingly, this was the role of the queen mother in many other ancient kingdoms of the Near East, not just the Davidic kingdom.

- As far back as the Epic of Gilgamesh, one of the most ancient literary works we know of, the queen mother filled the role of intercessor for the people.

She also had one more function.

- She was a visible sign of the king’s legitimate rule.

Remember, she wasn’t just the king’s mother, she was also



the former king's wife. Her motherhood of the king was a testimony to his descent from the previous king.

These are the things that made the queen mother uniquely important among all the subjects in the kingdom. The king may have had many wives, but he only had one mother.

That gave her an essential and unrepeatable place in the government of the kingdom.



VIII. SHE WHO HAS BROUGHT FORTH

Now, the last king and queen mother we see in the Old Testament is the pair who were led away into Babylon. But they aren't the last king and queen mother that we hear about.

Remember, when God established his covenant with David, he promised the young king that his kingdom would last forever. (2 Sam 7:16) But, when Nebuchadnezzar led the Davidic king and his subjects away into exile, some 400 years later, it seemed as if God had gone back on his promise to David.

But God doesn't go back on his promises. He just fulfills them in ways we don't always necessarily understand or expect.

The Jewish people knew that.

- They knew that God's promise was unconditional, and they believed in the words of the prophets, words that told of the day when the Kingdom of David would be restored.

Those prophecies about the restoration of the kingdom, however, weren't just about the future king.

- They were also about his mother.
 - For example, in a time of great distress, Isaiah told King Ahaz to look for a sign: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Is 7:14)



Earlier in that passage, we learned that this sign was meant to reassure Ahaz of God’s continued commitment to the “house of David” in the face of foreign threats and intrigues. (see Is 7:2, 13)

Micah even more explicitly prophesied a coming ruler from the House of David.

In Micah 5:1-3, he tells us that this ruler would be born in the city of David—Bethlehem. Like David, he would be a shepherd.

- Micah also mentions the **future ruler’s mother** referring to “she who has labor pains [who] has brought forth.”

So, once again, we have a prophet telling us that the sign of salvation is a future king who will be born of a woman.

At first, glance, there may seem nothing unusual about that.

- After all, aren’t all future kings born of a woman?

What else would they be born of?

Perhaps to us twenty-first century folks it might not seem that unusual for prophets to talk about a king being born of a woman. But to the ancient Israelites a few thousand years ago, it was very unusual.



Notice that Isaiah and Micah say nothing about the father of this future king.

- That's the unusual part. In the Bible (not to mention other ancient documents from the Near East) it is the father who almost always gets the mention.

The father is the person who figures prominently in any references to a son or a king, while the mother is often not mentioned at all. Think, for example, of “David, Son of Jesse,” or “Solomon, Son of David.”

But not in these prophecies! In them, all we hear is “King, son of a woman.”

That, at least in part, is what clues us in to the importance of this woman in God's plan.

IX. THE PROMISED KING

Perhaps you've noticed that throughout this lesson, we've been talking a lot about the Kingdom of David. That's not just because the queen mother was part of that kingdom.

- It's because the Kingdom of David is key to understanding the Kingdom of Christ.
- All the New Testament authors make it clear that Jesus—born of a virgin in Bethlehem and a shepherd of men—is the Son of David.

Jesus' Kingdom is the promised restoration of the Kingdom of David.



From the very beginning, the Apostles and the early Christians spoke about how Jesus fulfilled the prophets' promises about the Son of David.

- We see this in the opening chapters of Acts, when on Pentecost, just days after Jesus' Ascension into heaven, Peter and the Apostles are evangelizing in Jerusalem.

Read Acts 2:25-36

X. THE PROMISED MOTHER

The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is the promised King, the King whose coming was long ago foretold by the prophets.

It also makes it clear that his Kingdom is the Davidic Kingdom restored and transformed. And, of course, if Jesus is the King and his Kingdom is the restored Davidic Kingdom that means Mary is the Queen Mother.

And that is exactly what the New Testament shows us.

- For example, Matthew's Gospel begins with a genealogy of Jesus Christ.

It's a fascinating passage to study: What seems at first to be merely a list turns out to be a masterpiece of literary craft.

- To start with, Matthew divides the whole genealogy into three groups of 14 generations. (Mt 1:17)



- The fact that there are three groups is significant because in Hebrew the number three is considered a symbol of perfection...which makes sense when you consider that God consists of three persons.

The fact that there are 14 ancestors listed in each group is also significant. In Hebrew, numbers are represented by letters. In that, they're like Greek and Latin (Think: Roman numerals, with the I representing 1 and the V representing 5).

- Interestingly (but not surprisingly), the numerical value of the letters that spell out "David" is 14. Together, the letters add up to 14.
- So just by the numerical pattern of Matthew's genealogy, he shows us that Jesus is the perfect Son of David.

XI. THE PROMISED MOTHER, A QUEEN.

And at the end of this genealogy we find Mary.

- It concludes with "Joseph, the husband of Mary..."
- "of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ."

Notice how Matthew's words recall the words of Isaiah and Micah.

Also notice how Joseph is there because of Mary. Unlike any other man in that genealogy, he earns his place in it through his wife. He is not called the father of Jesus. Rather, it's the mother who is emphasized.



- She is the one of whom the promised King is born. She is the Queen Mother foretold by the prophets.

And another unusual thing is present in Matthew's genealogy. Four women are named. This is a striking departure from normal Hebrew genealogies, which lists succession through the father.

There is, however, one significant Old Testament exception to this norm. The genealogies of the Davidic kings of Judah list the Queen Mother alongside their royal sons. (1 Kgs 15:1-2, 2 Kgs 15:2, 33)

- And the last of those women before Mary in Matthew's genealogy is Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon. She was the prototypical queen mother, just as Solomon was the prototypical son of David.

And her place in the genealogy identifies her as a forerunner or a foreshadowing of Mary.

XII. HOLDING COURT

Matthew picks up this idea of a royal mother in the second chapter of his Gospel.

Read Matthew 2:1-12

In that passage, we see distinguished visitors from the East come to pay their respects to what, for all appearances, seems a tiny child born into an ordinary working class family.

The visitors, however, see things differently.



- They have traveled across the desert to see the newborn “king of the Jews.”

And what do they find when they arrive?

- “The child with Mary his mother.”

As we saw in Solomon’s court, when the king is in state, receiving visitors who have come to pay tribute to him, his mother is by his side. And that’s exactly what we have here in Matthew.

- Appropriately, these visitors to the infant’s humble court come bearing gifts, much as the visitors to Solomon’s court would have.

Note what those gifts were: Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold and spices were tributes regularly paid to Solomon by royal visitors. (1 Kgs 10:10, 25)

- And the only other time in Scripture when myrrh and frankincense are mentioned together is in the Song of Songs, when they are part of the pageantry of Solomon’s wedding day—a day when Solomon’s mother places the crown on his head. (See Songs 3:6-7, 11)

Again, in detail after detail, Matthew paints a picture of the child Jesus, the perfect Son of David, holding court in the same way as Solomon, the original son of David, held court.



XIII. A ROYAL TITLE

- Matthew is not the only New Testament writer who attests to Mary's place as the Queen Mother. Luke does it as well.
- At the Annunciation, the Angel Gabriel tells Mary that she will give birth to a royal son who will rule from the throne of David.

In saying that, he all but spells out that he is addressing the new Queen Mother of the new Davidic Kingdom.

Read Luke 1:31-33

A few verses later, in his account of the Visitation, Luke shows us someone else recognizing Mary as the Queen Mother: Elizabeth.

Read Luke 1:43

- That title—"mother of my Lord"—is full of queenly significance.

In ancient Israel, the king was addressed as "my Lord," and his mother as mother of my Lord. (2 Sam 24:21)

By using that title in her address of Mary, Elizabeth recognizes her as the new Queen Mother.



XIV. QUEEN OF HEAVEN

Our final glimpse of the Queen Mother in the Bible comes in the passage we read at the outset of this lesson, the famous symbolic vision of a woman in the Book of Revelation.

Many of the symbols in that book can be hard to interpret, and over the years there have been various interpretations of just who exactly the woman “clothed with the sun” is.

- In the Catholic understanding, the woman represents Mary, as well as Israel and the Church.

As we discussed in Lesson Two of this study, signs and symbols, because they’re signs and symbols and not literal representations, are allowed to mean more than one thing.

But, because this study is on Mary, we’re going to focus on that particular meaning here.

Why does the Church ascribe one of the meanings of that symbol to Mary?

- For starters, the “great sign” is a woman giving birth...
- That recalls Isaiah’s prophecy that the sign of the kingdom’s restoration would be a woman giving birth.
- Likewise, the child to be born is described as one who will “rule all the nations with a rod of iron”...



- Which is exactly how the Messiah is described in Psalm 2:7-9.
- In Revelation, the woman “clothed with the sun” wears a “crown of twelve stars.” Those stars are another symbol. They represent both the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve Apostles. (21:12, 14)
- And, in the Old Testament, not surprisingly, the queen mother wore a crown...

Jeremiah 13:18 tells us as much: “Say to the king and the queen mother: Take a lowly seat, for your beautiful crown has come down from your head...”

17. Queen of Heaven, cont.

- Revelation shows us the Queen Mother. She is enthroned in heaven with her son, the King—the perfect fulfillment of the promise of the restored Kingdom.
- Revelation shows us Mary, crowned and enthroned as Queen Mother.
- That enthronement no more detracts from her son’s, the King’s glory, than the enthronement of the queen mother in ancient Israel detracted from the glory of Israel’s kings.

In fact, it’s just the opposite.

- It is because the king is glorious that his mother is also glorious.



Her glory is a participation in his glory. She is honored as a way of honoring him.

XV. FROM IMAGE TO DOGMA

- The image of Mary as Queen Mother is directly related to two of the Church's most important teachings about Mary.

The New Testament writers' understanding of Mary as the Queen Mother in the restored and transformed Davidic Kingdom, shaped the way the early Church understood Mary's role in Salvation History.

In turn, their understanding formed the Church's official teachings about Mary.

In our last session, we'll explore the relationship of this image to the doctrine of Mary's Assumption and Coronation as Queen of Heaven, as well as to Marian devotion.

- We're going to conclude this lesson, however, by focusing on the title's connection to the first official Marian dogma defined by the Church: Mary's status as Mother of God.

Of all Mary's many titles, that one, "Mother of God," may be the one we use the most.

- After all, every time we pray the Rosary, we say it at least 50 times.

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen."



XVI. ECHOING THE NEW TESTAMENT

Every time we pray that prayer, we echo the words of Elizabeth at the Visitation recorded in Luke 1.

- Recall how she greeted Mary with the queenly title, “Mother of my Lord.” (Lk 1:43)

That essentially means the same thing as “Mother of God.”

- The Greek word for the title is *Theotokos*, [thee-o-toe-koes] which literally means “God-bearer.”

That title, “Mother of God,” is not only the most commonly used title for Mary; it’s also one of the oldest. We can find examples of Christians using it in the very first centuries of the Church.

- The early Church Fathers, including St. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and St. Alexander all called Mary, “Mother of God” or the equivalent, “Mother of my Lord.”

XVII. THE SUB TUUM

The title also appears in one of the oldest known Christian prayers, the *Sub Tuum*.

Prayed by Egyptian Christians, this prayer dates at the absolute latest to 250 AD, and it’s probably much older than that.

The words of the prayer are as follows:



- We fly to your patronage
Oh holy Mother of God.
Despise not our petitions
in our necessities,
but deliver us from all dangers,
Oh ever glorious and blessed Virgin.

XVIII. NO CONTEST

So we see that the first Christians called Mary the “Mother of God” without any hesitation.

- After all, there was scriptural precedent: The words of Elizabeth.

Also, it just seemed the logical thing to do.

- If Jesus was God...
- And Mary was his mother...
- Then that made her the Mother of God.

That sort of logic depends on a principle called the “Communication of Idioms.”

- According to that principle, whatever one says about either of Christ’s natures can be said of Christ himself.

That’s because his two natures, the divine nature and the human nature, were united in him. He is one divine person.



So, even though God is eternal, with no beginning and no end, we can still say that God the Son was born in Bethlehem and died on the cross at Calvary.

XIX. THE CONTEST BEGINS

For hundreds of years, no one so much as said “Boo” about calling Mary the Mother of God, but in the fifth century, that began to change.

Some people then raised the same objections that some non-Catholics raise today: They argued that the title “Mother of God” implied that Mary was the “originator of God.”

- Those objectors said that they could accept the title “Mother of Christ,” but not “Mother of God.”

At the heart of those objections, however, was another objection.

- It was an objection to the unity of Christ’s two natures.

Mary, they claimed, gave birth only to Christ’s human nature, not his divine nature.

The Church, led by Pope Celestine I and St. Cyril of Alexandria, vigorously disagreed.

- As St. Cyril pointed out, a mother gives birth to a person, not a nature.



- Accordingly, Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ, who was and is a divine person.

Although Mary did not “originate” or “generate” God, she certainly did bear him in her womb and give birth to him. She was God’s mother.

XX. THE HEART OF THE MATTER

- The controversy over Mary’s title as Mother of God was addressed in 431 AD at the Council of Ephesus.

The Council was actually called by Pope Celestine I to settle the “Mother of God” debate.

It may seem a little strange to us to call a big ecumenical council, and ask all the bishops of the ancient world to make perilous journeys across land and sea, just to settle a simple question about whether or not Christians could call Mary the Mother of God.

But again, there’s a whole lot more was at stake than just Mary’s title.

The Christian teaching about Christ’s two natures was the real issue.

- The Church wanted to settle, once and for all, the question raging across the ancient world: Was Jesus one person or two?



- The idea that Jesus was both a human person and a divine person was being taught by a man named Nestorius, and his teachings were leading many people astray.

XXI. 24. DECISION OF THE COUNCIL.

- The Council of Ephesus roundly rejected Nestorius' teachings and confirmed the ancient teaching of the Church. They declared that:
 - Jesus is one divine person, with two natures.
 - His mother's human nature...
 - And his Father's divine nature.

Mary did not give Jesus his divine nature or his divine personhood—those he possessed from all eternity as the only begotten Son of the Father.

But she also didn't just give him his flesh: She gave birth to the whole person. She gave birth to Jesus Christ, both God and man.

That is what we confess every time we say the Apostles' Creed.

- “We believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...”



XXII. 25. TRUE MOTHER

None of us would think much of a mother who wouldn't do everything in her power to protect her child. That's part of what it means to be a mother, right?

Well, on a supernatural level, that's what Mary is doing for her son, Jesus, by possessing the title, "Mother of God"—protecting her son...or at least protecting the truth about her son.

- To reiterate what we talked about before: Every truth about Mary says more about Jesus than it does about her.
 - Just as Mary's virginity reinforced that Jesus was both human and divine...
 - So too does Mary's title, "Mother of God," reinforce that Jesus is one divine person with two natures.

He was one man, not two.

- He was not a human person who received divine guidance.
- He was not a divine person who took on the appearance of a man.
- He was one person, born of a woman, who possessed two natures.
- He is all God and all man.

That's why the title "Mother of God" is so important. And that's why we are in no way taking any honor away from



Christ when we use it. Nor are we making any claims that Mary is greater than Christ or the originator of God.

We're simply stating a truth that must be stated in order to protect an essential truth about Christ.

XXIII. THE QUEEN MOTHER REVISITED

And, in a similar way, that's what all of Mary's queenly predecessors did for their sons.

- If you recall, one of the three essential tasks of the queen mother was to be a sign of her son's legitimacy.
 - She was the link between his father, the former rightful king, and her son, the present rightful king.
- Likewise, Mary as the virginal "Mother of God" is the link between her son's humanity and divinity.
 - She is the sign that he is both God and man, the long awaited Son of David who can rule over a Kingdom that is heavenly, not earthly, that is everlasting, not temporal.

In our last session, we'll explore the implications of Mary as the Queen Mother in even more depth, and see how it forms part of the foundation for Catholic devotion to Mary.

Before we can do that, however, there's one more dimension to the biblical portrait of Mary that we need to flesh out. We need to examine Mary as the all-holy Mother of God who



was conceived without sin. And that's what we'll focus on
next time

Follow-Up Reading and Preparation for the Next Lesson

Hail Holy Queen, Chapter 5 (pages 94-98)

Genesis 3:15-20

Revelation 12:1-17

The Bible and the Virgin Mary

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Additional study resources can be found on the St. Paul Center website
at: www.salvationhistory.com.